CLAIMS

1. A helper entity for selectively offering assistance to an endpoint entity connected to at least one media channel established in respect of a network communication session to which the endpoint entity is joined, the helper entity comprising:

- an entity manager for receiving, in respect of the communication session, channel information about the channels established for the session;
- a transport subsystem for establishing, in accordance with the channel information received by the entity manager, at least one media channel connection to a session transport mechanism associated with said session;
- a media subsystem providing a respective media handler of appropriate type for the each media channel connection established by the transport subsystem, each media handler serving to receive and transmit content over the corresponding media channel;
- a monitor subsystem connected to the media handlers for matching content received by the media handlers with predetermined triggers; and
- an advisor subsystem responsive to responsive to the monitor subsystem finding a match to transmit advisory content on at least one channel via the corresponding media handler.

2. A helper entity according to claim 1, wherein predetermined triggers are specified in the form of at least one of specific content, content combinations, and content patterns.

3. A helper entity according to claim 1, wherein at least one said predetermined trigger is specified in the form of content combinations or content patterns involving content on multiple channels.

4. A helper entity according to claim 1, wherein the monitor subsystem manager includes. for at least one channel, a converter for converting the content received over the corresponding channel into a different form, this form being a form in which the monitor subsystem is adapted to carry out its matching of content with triggers.

5. A helper entity according to claim 1, wherein the advisor subsystem is operative to adapt the advisory content it delivers to be appropriate to content recently received over the connected channels.

6. A helper entity according to claim 1, wherein the advisor subsystem is operative to receive context data regarding the communication session and to adapt the advisory content it delivers accordingly.

7. A helper entity according to claim 6, wherein the context data includes data about endpoint entities connected to the session.

8. A helper entity according to claim 6, wherein the context data includes identity data about the endpoint entities joined to the session, the advisory subsystem including database access functionality for using the identity data to look up information about the entities in a database, this information then being used by the advisor system to adapt the advisory content it delivers.

9. In combination, a helper entity according to any one of the preceding claims, an information page server for serving information pages, and a service system for establishing a respective communication session for each of at least some of the information pages and for joining to such session endpoint entities browsing the corresponding page, each communication session that is established having an associated transport mechanism allowing the exchange of data, via data transfer channels, between endpoint systems joined to the session; the service system being operative to join the helper entity to a said session to offer assistance when appropriate to endpoint systems joined to the session.

10. The combination set out in claim 9, wherein the advisory content provided by the advisor subsystem is specific to the page associated with the session to which the helper entity is joined.

11. The combination of claim 9, wherein the service-session functional entity joins the helper entity to the session in a manner such that other entities joined to the session are unaware of the joining of the helper entity.

12. The combination set out in claim 9, wherein the service system includes a real-time database for recording for each session that is established, the identity of the associated information page and of any endpoint entity currently joined to the session, and a customer database, the helper entity including database access functionality for accessing the real-time database to ascertain the identities of the entities joined to the session which it then uses to adapt the advisory content it delivers.

13. In combination, a helper entity according to any one of claims 1 to 8, and a service system for setting up a communication session with an associated transport mechanism allowing the exchange of data, via data transfer channels for different media types, between endpoint entities joined to the session; the service system, in setting up a communication session, creating a service-session functional entity for controlling the joining of endpoint entities to the session in accordance with a predetermined service behaviour, and the service-session functional entity being responsible for joining the helper entity to the session as required, this joining involving the sending of said channel information to the helper entity.

14. The combination of claim 13, wherein the service-session functional entity joins the helper entity to the session in a manner such that other entities joined to the session are unaware of the joining of the helper entity.

15. The combination of claim 13, wherein the service-session functional entity comprises a session instance with generic behaviour for adding and removing endpoint entities to the communication session and for recording the endpoint entities currently joined to the communication session, and an associated service instance with service-specific behaviour determining when the session instance is to add and remove endpoint entities.

16. The combination of claim 13, wherein the state of connection of the helper entity to the transport mechanism is signalled to the session-service functional entity by leg messages passed between a leg controller of the entity manager of the helper entity and a corresponding leg controller of the service-session functional entity.